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SUBJECT: SCENESETTER FOR A/S FRAZER'S VISIT TO BOTSWANA, SEPTEMBER 6-7, 2008

11. (U) Country Overview: Independent since 1966, Botswana is frequently hailed as an African success story: a multiparty democracy with a record of political and social stability and respect for human rights. Botswana shares a vast, desolate, and porous border with its neighbors: South Africa, Zambia, Zimbabwe and Namibia. Botswana's population of 1.7 million is spread throughout an arid country the size of Texas. The largest ethnic group is the Tswana group, which is organized into several Tsetswana-speaking tribes. Key minority groups include the Bakalanga in the north and the Basarwa (aka "San" or "Bushman") in the central and western areas.

12. (SBU) The current ruling party, the Botswana Democratic Party (BDP) has ruled ably and benevolently since independence, with the current government inaugurated on April 01, 2008. Despite the predominance of one party, Botswana generally protects political, economic, and social freedoms. In 2007, Reporters Without Frontiers scores Botswana as equal to the United States in its Freedom of the Press index, although Freedom House International did list some areas for concern in its report.

13. (U) Economically, Botswana is now considered a "middle income" country. Its rapid development has been driven by a rich diamond mining industry, revenues from which continue to be invested heavily in health, education, and infrastructure. Botswana currently has no national debt, and the government is the largest employer. In its 2007 rankings, Transparency International ranked Botswana as the least corrupt country in Africa, ahead of some western countries including Italy and Greece. However, its proximity to its powerful neighbor, South Africa, means that Botswana tends to be a second choice when it comes to foreign direct investment, regardless of its favorable preconditions.

14. (U) In coming years, Botswana will deal with several key issues. Unemployment remains high at 17.6%. The rich-poor gap is widening, and revenue from diamond mining (33% of GDP) that has funded a large, relatively benign public sector has crowded out the emergence of a robust and entrepreneurial private sector. In the health field, the country is combating an HIV/AIDS prevalence of 25%. Anti-retroviral treatment (ART) is now available to most people in need, but the government, through programs often conducted in partnership with PEPFAR-funded organizations, aim at ensuring an HIV-free generation by 2016.

Domestic Politics

15. (U) In 2008, former President Festus Mogae retired, and current President Ian Khama, son of the country's first president, hereditary chief of a key tribe, and a military general who once headed the Botswana Defense Force, was sworn into office on April 01, 2008. He will serve until general elections in October 2009. Given the President Khama's current high popularity rating, historical satisfaction with the BDP, and lack of an organized opposition, Khama and the BDP are largely expected to win an easy reelection.

16. (SBU) President Khama, in his inaugural address, stressed what he called "the four 'Ds'": democracy, development, discipline, and dignity. Of these four "Ds", discipline has become the hallmark of his presidency. He has focused on improving government service levels, and has been known to appear unexpectedly to inspect offices throughout the ministries. He has also targeted perceived social ills, such as alcoholism and drunken driving, by make sweeping

presidential decrees, including mandating earlier closing times for bars and a 70% increase in the price of alcohol. Implementation of these decrees has met with delays, as business owners and trade groups protest and file legal challenges. Such measures have led some critics to say that Khama has assumed an overly paternal role in governing Botswana.

¶17. (SBU) In Summer 2008, the Parliament introduced a bill to register all media practitioners with the government instead of through a self-regulating, professional accreditation system. While Khama has not sponsored this bill, it has drawn similar criticism to other attempted changes under his government, namely that it amounts to excessive government involvement that infringes on certain aspects of a free society. Parliament has invited public comments on the proposed legislation, and has not yet voted on it.

Zimbabwe

¶18. (U) Despite some criticism, Khama remains very popular, not only for his ties to Botswana's traditional culture but also for his prominent international stance on the Zimbabwe issue. Under Khama, the GOB's stance shifted from quiet diplomacy to pointed criticism of Zimbabwe, which even amounted to a refusal by Botswana to recognize Mugabe and a boycott of the August 2008 Southern African Development Community (SADC) meeting that Mugabe attended. This position has met with widespread approval, and editorials and public comments fault other African countries, including South Africa, with turning a blind eye to the true situation in Zimbabwe. Despite strong condemnation of the situation in Zimbabwe and an avoidance of official high level contacts, Botswana does maintain pragmatic relations with Zimbabwe on daily matters.

¶19. (U) The crisis in Zimbabwe continues to have serious social and economic impacts on Botswana. Zimbabwe's economic and political crises have damaged investor confidence in the region. Botswana already witnessed many illegal economic migrants from Zimbabwe, and the most recent situation has produced an increase in political refugees. These arrivals strain Botswana's social service infrastructure, especially medical care. Still, the GOB has remained very welcoming to refugees and drafted a detailed plan for processing refugees and ensuring that welcome centers and refugee camps have been prepared. Working with the UNHCR, among other partners, the GOB continues to explore accommodating the needs of the refugees, especially the medical needs and pharmaceutical requirements of HIV-positive arrivals. Finally, criminal activity has increased and has, correctly or incorrectly, been attributed to the Zimbabwean immigrants.

Regional Stability

¶10. (U) While Botswana is among the most stable countries in Africa, it is affected by regional conflicts or unrest, such as the current situation in Zimbabwe. Engagement with the GOB through military-to-military training programs such as the International Military Education and Training (IMET) program aims to increase the ability of the Botswana Defense Force to assist in border control activities or peacekeeping and disaster response.

¶11. (U) The stability and general transparency of the government and society in Botswana makes it an ideal host for an African campus of the International Law Enforcement Academy (ILEA). Opened in 2003, the state-of-the-art facility just outside of Gaborone focuses on equipping police, customs, and immigration officials to counter terrorist threats and transnational crime, including trafficking in persons, drug trafficking, and money laundering. ILEA-Botswana arranges for instructors from a wide variety of USG agencies and U.S. academic institution to teach students from among the 29 African countries that are members of ILEA.

Economic Issues

¶12. (U) Botswana is host to the secretariat of the Southern African Development Community (SADC). However, U.S. economic and political cooperation within SADC is stymied by the organization's apparent acceptance of the political situation in Zimbabwe. Although the U.S. and SADC cooperate in a number of ways, including support for harmonization of customs, power pool sharing, trade capacity building and combating terrorism, Zimbabwe remains a roadblock to

greater development collaboration.

¶13. (U) The USG continues to pursue other avenues of economic cooperation, including through opportunities provided by the African Growth and Opportunity Act (AGOA). The Gaborone-based USAID "Trade Hub" assists the SADC region to advance regional market integration and exports to global markets. The Trade Hub helps the GOB to develop public-private sector policy dialogue, while fostering entrepreneurship by individuals. The Trade Hub has identified niche markets to boost AGOA exports both bilaterally and within SADC. Most recently, an artisan assisted by the Trade Hub began exporting furniture to a high end retailer in the United States, and his success was highlighted in media reporting on the seventh U.S. Sub-Saharan Africa Trade and Economic Cooperation Forum, which featured the artisan as a speaker. Because of budgetary concerns and oversights, future funding for the USAID Trade Hub remains uncertain.

Health Issues

¶14. (U) Although various statistics may differ, Botswana is generally considered to have an HIV/AIDS prevalence of nearly 25%. The GOB, through initiatives funded by diamond money, provides ART to more than 80% of the population in need. Long-term, the GOB has developed "Vision 2016", a plan to have an HIV/AIDS-free generation by 2016, and has pursued measures to accomplish this goal. GOB coordination and implementation capacities are stretched thin by a high HIV-prevalence population and limited human resources.

¶15. (U) To provide assistance, the U.S. Centers for Disease Control and Prevention cooperate with the GOB through a partnership known as BOTUSA. Working with funding from the President's Emergency Plan for AIDS Relief (PEPFAR), which will have provided roughly \$300 million from FY2004 through FY2008, BOTUSA has grown to include HIV/AIDS prevention, care and treatment programs, including TB research and HIV prevention research. BOTUSA also collaborates with Government to identify gaps in services and establish model programs to fill these gaps. Support from BOTUSA also strengthens underlying health infrastructure and systems, including commodities procurement systems and human resources.

¶16. (U) Former President Mogae has been an outspoken leader in combating HIV/AIDS, and he recently spoke at the 17th International AIDS Conference in Mexico City. During his presidency, Mogae invited the U.S. Peace Corps to return to Botswana to assist with programs designed to combat the spread of HIV/AIDS. With 103 volunteers in country, the Peace Corps has established a positive reputation for providing key assistance in rural communities.

The Basarwa (aka "San" or "Bushmen")

¶17. (SBU) One lingering domestic issue concerns the January 2002 relocation of the indigenous Basarwa by the GOB out of the Central Kalahari Game Reserve (CKGR). This received international attention and some NGOs, most notably Survival International (SI), alleged that the GOB relocated the Basarwa in order to pursue diamond mining in the CKGR. The GOB claims that the relocation is a civilizing mission. It wants the Basarwa integrated into Botswana society. The government is very sensitive to discussion or criticism on this issue.

The Basarwa (San, Bushmen)

¶18. (SBU) A Basarwa NGO, First Peoples of the Kalahari brought a suit against the government, charging that the Basarwa's constitutional and human rights were infringed by the relocation. In late summer 2007, the High Court delivered a verdict that has proved a pyrrhic victory for the Basarwa. The High Court determined that the GOB could not force the relocation of the Basarwa but also was not obligated to provide certain public benefits, such as access to water. In the meantime, the GOB has since announced plans to open a diamond concession in the CKGR. Discussions continue internally between the Basarwa representatives and between the Basarwa groups and the GOB on what the High Court's decision means and how it should be implemented.